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Social Media Will Drive Development And Implementation of Relational Strategic Human Resource Strategies

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Keywords: Social Media, HR Policy, Recruitment, HRM, Strategic HR, SHRM, Relational HRM

Intended Outcomes: Discussion, development of the concept, further investigation of current literature in preparation for research

Abstract:

This paper explores if management of Social Media has the potential to drive organisations in implementation of relational Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) strategies. First it will outline some origins and pervasive aspects to Social Media use, starting in America with the first Obama Presidential Campaign. The paper will then go on to look at SHRM trends and professional responses to factoring in use of Social Media in the workplace.

Jue et al (2010) declared the use of social media in the 2008 Obama Presidential Election campaign as ‘unprecedented’ and ‘a key factor’ in his eventual election to the position Commander In Chief of the world’s most powerful nation (NPI 2011).

Since this significant event, 2008 Social Media use continues to explode as: new technologies are developed and employed, innovations in application emerge, and developing economies improve technology and infrastructure to enable them to ‘log-on’. In the Middle East and Africa there was a 33.9% increase in social network users in 2011, whilst Asia-Pacific’s user population grew 27.5% (eMarketer.com 2011).

Whilst the global trends are not the immediate purview of this paper, the statistics serve to demonstrate that social media use is still increasing and that the effects and influence of social media are not bounded by nations or levels of economic development.

Through the global trends we can discern that the internet is having a significant effect on the human experience with increasing volumes and scope for either replacement or augmentation of many human tasks with online and virtual technologies.

At a personal level, a study by Correa et al (2009) shows that studies are now making links between personality and internet use, whilst Kleumper and Rosen (2009) go further and find

that trained judges are ‘able to distinguish between those individuals who are high on each characteristic (of the Big Five) from those who are low on that characteristic’.

This type of benefit has a significant impact on HR practice and theory, and in many cases underpins progressive use of Social Media in forming HR responses to organisational needs especially in the arena of recruitment. In a Jobvite (2012) poll of 1,000 recruiters, *Social Recruiting* was seen as ‘an essential HR practice’ with 92% of US companies confirming social network use in 2012, up from 78% five years ago. Of these, ‘3 out of 4 hiring managers and recruiters check candidates’ social profiles’.

This corresponds to trends outside of the US as recruiters globally are increasing their use of social media in recruitment processes. A Penna Plc (2010) survey found ‘Trust and confidence in social media among HR professionals has grown and 70% of recruiters now actively use and support the use of social media’.

Progressive use of HR in recruitment is sharply contrasted by business responses to Risk from wider employee groups engaging in Social Media use.

Organisational Human Resource Management responses are underscored by two primary strategic approaches: *Transactional* and *Relational* (Rousseau 1989).

Transactional HRM emphasises exchange agreements and efficiency. According to Eisenhardt (1989) this relationship should reflect the efficient organisation of information and risk-bearing costs.

Relational HRM emphasises the importance of trust, with some scholars maintaining that trust provides important insights into the development of cooperation in organisations (Tyler 2003). Furthermore, trust is perceived as ‘the lubrication that makes it possible for organizations to work’ (Bennis and Nanus 1985, in Gould-Williams 2003, p. 31), as an ‘integrating mechanism that creates and supports social systems and as a source of increased efficiency’ (Gould-Williams 2003), and deriving from ‘the feeling of having trust in another person and associated with reciprocal interpersonal relations of care’ (Mayer et al., 1995).

A key element of *high trust relationship building*, a logical outcome of a *relational HRM approach*, is the tenet of the collective and individual *employee voice* (Dundon et al 2004). Margaret Prosser of the TGWU argues that a ‘collective voice achieves what the lone voice could never do: it humanises and civilises the workplace, arguing that collective representation is the foundation of a partnership relationship that brings positive benefits for business’ (Prosser, 2001).

The choice of a transactional, legal reaction to Risks associated with Social Media use in the workplace potentially prevents and limits an organisational conversation which relates to building trust and appreciating *employee voice*.

The CIPD (2012) advises professionals to ‘create a balance with policies’ regarding acceptable behaviours and use of social media. HR’s professional body then elaborates, recommending detailed communications and policies to cover monitoring, use of email, the

internet, and data protection in order to reduce the risk of legal liability resulting in breach of confidentiality, use of unlicensed software, breach of contract, and discrimination.

This *transactional response* is echoed by other employer advisory bodies such as ACAS (2012) warning employers against the dangers social media at work including cyber bullying.

However, some business leaders are presenting a more *relational approach* in practice: “*I don’t think you should have a social media policy...if you are high policy and high control. You are saying to people we don’t trust you.*” Neil Morrison, Group HR director of Random House commenting at the CIPD Conference in 2011. The approach is echoed by The UK HR Director of Logica Mathew Davies who said that “*We (Logica) recognise that control is no longer ours....whether you like it or not the conversation is already happening.*”

The control nature of the transactional HR response to the need for principles by which Social Media use is governed, is akin to Corporate Governance implementing what Lynn Paine (HBR, 1994) refers to as a Compliance Strategy, chosen over an Ethical Strategy. She closes by stating unequivocally that ‘in creating a climate that encourages exemplary conduct may be the best way to discourage damaging misconduct’.

Implications:

There are several areas of significance arising from this:

- Whilst large tracts of business purposes and objectives turn towards more *socially-inspired mores*, management of Social Media is heavily reliant upon *controls and compliance*
- Personal freedoms in Social Media use which support superior HR recruitment performance contrast sharply with HR led controls to manage Risk with Social Media
- Control approaches to Social Media Management are dependent upon a nascent legal understanding which is still being tested
- Revision of control models in Social Media use and replacement with a relational HRM model requires trust-building throughout an organisation.

HR needs to ‘turn the ship around’ on the regulatory nature of Social Media Management, which is starting to be discussed and realised in the HR field. In *Social Media Management and Madness* Jaluch HR Consultancy (2013) is one of a burgeoning group of HR professionals who view ‘over the top processes’ as contrary to employee engagement strategies. Human Resource Executive Online (2012) is more prosaic, stating ‘When it comes to social media in the workplace, HR is just starting to learn to stop being the police, and to start joining in the charge toward change’.

Limitations: There is potential bias in recruiting using Social Media, due to the channel attracting more competent users of Social Media, and this is alluded to across the works of Correa et al (2009). This may skew statistical increases and value by ‘loading the dice’ of

superior performance by HR in Social Media use for recruitment. This is the subject of a separate piece of research.

Limitations in research may arise from dearth of organisations available in the research sample that have a defined transactional vs relational SHRM approach.

Future Research: The data and methodology for this research will assess the relational vs transactional nature of the overall SHRM approach and then measure openness to social media use. It is expected that data collected will prove:

- a) a broader tolerance for social media use;
- b) an explicit understanding of employee voice;
- c) and superior performance against key HR metrics including tenure, attrition, and job satisfaction;

are evident in organisations adopting a relational approach to SHRM;

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